

March 21, 2007

House Education Committee
RE: Full Day Kindergarten

My name is Pamela Choc and I am a full time mother to three children and a certified Montana Elementary School Teacher. I urge you vote against full day Kindergarten because of the lack of long-term benefits, the fact that it puts too much pressure on young children, and the unfair burden it places on taxpayers.

Proponents of full day kindergarten have suggested many theoretical advantages, but studies indicate only short-term benefits. In fact, students' test scores are identical by third grade regardless of their attendance in full day or half day Kindergarten. Boosting short-term test scores does not benefit Montana children. What are we willing to sacrifice for a few years of slightly elevated standardized test scores? Education and childrearing should never be about immediate returns --we should concern ourselves with sustainable systems that provide life-long benefit to students.

RAND, a nonprofit research and analysis corporation did an extensive longitudinal analysis on a nationally representative sample of children to examine issues related to school readiness and the effect of full-day kindergarten on student performance. Their findings indicate, "Attendance in a full-day kindergarten program was negatively associated with attitudes toward learning, self-control, and interpersonal skills, and was positively related toward internalizing (measured by a scale indicating presence of anxiety, loneliness, low self-esteem, and sadness) and externalizing behaviors." They concluded that "Our analyses reinforce the findings of earlier studies that suggest that full-day kindergarten programs may not enhance achievement in the long term." Further, their study raised "the possibility that full-day kindergarten programs may actually be detrimental to mathematics performance and nonacademic readiness skills."¹

Learning does not only occur in desks with pencils poised—how can we quantify the value of education in holding children in our laps while reading books, discussing and learning together? Can we really say that playing dress-up, pretending, playing with siblings, coloring and exercising are not important for a 5-year-old's education?

The United States is falling farther and farther behind in educational achievement, but full-day Kindergarten is not the magic answer to this problem, nor is it the answer to other social issues it claims to solve. Reading the text of this bill, far-fetched claims are made suggesting that full-day Kindergarten will positively impact home ownership – it is a farce to suggest that home ownership could possibly be extrapolated from Kindergarten data. Finland's school system is widely considered the best in the world, yet Finnish children begin school at age 7. A love of reading and unwavering family involvement are the strongest reasons for their success.

¹ <http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG558/> Accessed March 21, 2007.

I have spoken with many parents regarding this issue. Most agree that full day Kindergarten is too much too soon. Those who are in favor of full day Kindergarten often mention how happy they are about the free childcare aspect—they will no longer have to pay for daycare during the second half of the day or leave work in order to take their child to daycare. I have not had a single parent mention the supposed educational benefits. While many children may benefit from increases in state sponsored childcare, this discussion is outside of the scope of our educational system.

My husband and I have worked very hard to ensure that our three children receive the positive benefits of a full-time, stay-at-home parent. It is frustrating to watch other families receive tax breaks for sending their children to daycare. This bill is a slap in our face—despite our sacrifices to avoid the impacts and costs of daycare, we find our pocketbook funding daycare through taxes, and our children attending a daycare called Kindergarten. That is not fair to our teachers—they are more than daycare providers and should not be looked at as such by parents. Teachers are put in an awkward situation by increased curriculum demands for Kindergarten-- it's no wonder so many support an increase in hours of class time. These teachers are already taxed enough; please encourage reasonable expectations for Kindergarten and educators. More hours are not the answer.

It has been said that this bill only allows funding for full day Kindergarten, and that the program will be only optionally implemented and optionally attended. However, if full day Kindergarten is adopted, half-day options will completely disappear. What school will turn down the extra funding? Many educators and administrators believe heartedly in this bill – will any of their schools offer half-day options? I feel fortunate that that our government relies on the voices of all people, not only those who are served the most from increased program budgets and from short-term test score increases.

All we are asking for is assurance that choices to send our children to school for half days and provisions for a gradual transition into school remain. We wish to continue nurturing our children's natural curiosities and encourage their love of learning during the other half of the day.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Pamela Choc". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Pamela" being more prominent than the last name "Choc".

Pamela Choc
723 Bridgeview Ct.
Helena, MT 59601

As an early childhood educator, I have some concerns regarding the practice of full time kindergarten.

Children are really at the mercy of the adults in their lives. We have a very important responsibility to ensure that we consider their needs and take actions that seem to serve their best interest. They will trust us and do as we expect, such is the life of a child.

If we put children in situations that they are not yet ready to handle, what reprieve do they have and how do they make their frustrations known? Usually we will see behaviors that give us a clue regarding their distress.

Although full-day kindergarten has been purported to have benefits as outlined in the opening statement of this bill, it is vitally important that we look at the possible detrimental effects and be prepared to offer options and support to children who are perhaps, not ready for such a leap.

Some questions to consider would be:

What checks and balances will be in place to determine how each individual child is handling the pressure of full day kindergarten?

Physically some children are just not ready to sit and focus without some rest, what will be built into the system to allow for periods of rest and restoration?

Currently with half-day kindergarten, class size has been manageable, how will schools ensure that class size will not increase to a point where a child who is struggling does not get lost in the crowd?

How will parents' feedback and concerns be documented and what problem-solving vehicles will be in place to respond to those concerns?

Flexibility, individual considerations, and team work with parents as active players in this new venture will be of utmost importance.

We know that children have amazing potential and in the right setting with the right kind of support they can reach for the sky and that potential can be brought to full fruition. But we as educators and parents must be sensitive and aware of their needs and provide a balance to avoid over-stressing and overwhelming them to a point of feeling a sense of failure. We must be proactive and alert to make sure no child is lost in the shuffle. We must take a pledge to not allow systems to become more important than individuals. We carry the trust of our children in our hands. It is a fragile, living thing and must not be abused or neglected. Let us vow to not let these children down.

Chadene Atkins, Owner
Discoveries Preschool
Helena, Montana

Re: Bill No. SB123

March 21, 2007

Dear House Education Committee,

I am writing in strong **opposition to the proposed Full-time kindergarten legislation**. Thank you for honoring my written opinion as part of your decision-making process.

I am aware that the current proposal for full-time kindergarten states that it does not "require" a child to participate in an all-day program, and still I am not settled with this allowance because it will ultimately allow for future legislation to be introduced striking this language from the law and forcing parents to concede. It seems apparent that this is a ploy for the proponents to get a foot in the door for later gain.

Full-time kindergarten costs to the State will surely be significant and indefinite. Certainly it will be necessary for schools to provide professional development for all-day kindergarten teachers and design a proper kindergarten curriculum specific to developmentally-gearred academics. And won't the gains in full-day kindergarten only decline if upper-grade curricula is not adjusted to reflect kindergarten improvements? It is important to recognize that full-time kindergarten programs will have a substantial fiscal impact on the programs and services of the entire school.

Children should be introduced to school more slowly. Half-day is an easier transition into school. Full-day is too long of a day for many five year old children. Developmentally, they are not ready. At this age, they need to play!

For those children who are not physically or mentally ready for a full day at school, there will be exhaustion; and therefore, an inability to fully participate in the classroom. Are we rushing our children into academics only to "stress them out" and turn them away from future desires for learning? What measures are in place in the proposed Bill No. SB123 to assist these children who are overwhelmed?

The greatest benefit from full-day kindergarten is for at-risk children from low socio-economic backgrounds. (Clark,

2001; Clark & Kirk, 2000; Fusaro, 1997; Jones, Pollock, Marockie, 1988; Karweit, 1992; Koopmans, 1991; Pasco School District, 1987; Puleo, 1988; Rothenberg, 1984). Are their other community resources (including parents!) that are more appropriate to address the important needs of these children?

I cannot help thinking that the majority of advocates for full-time kindergarten are parents who will benefit financially using the all day program as state-funded childcare.

There has been much research done on all-day kindergarten, but it is difficult to find research that has been done by an objective source that is not deeply involved in the current education industrial complex.

Please take the time to consider a holistic view of this proposal.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Erin McMahon", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Erin McMahon

410 S. Fee Street

Helena, Montana

Clark, P. (2001). *Recent research on all-day kindergarten*. ERIC Digest. Champaign, IL: ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education.

Clark, P. & Kirk, E., (2000). *All-day kindergarten*. [Electronic version]. *Childhood Education*, 76, 228-231.

Fusaro, J.A. (1997). *The effect of full day kindergarten on student achievement: A meta-analysis*. [Electronic version]. *Child Study Journal*, 27, 269-280.

Jones, H.L., Pollock, B., & Marockie, H. (1988). *Full day kindergarten as a treatment for at-risk students: Ohio county schools*. *ERS Spectrum*, 6, 3-7.

Karweit, N. (1992). *The kindergarten experience*. *Educational Leadership*, 49, 82-86.

Koopmans, M. (1991). *A study of the longitudinal effects of all-day kindergarten attendance on achievement*. Newark Board of Education, NJ. Office of Research, Evaluation and Testing.

Pasco School District 1, Washington. (1987). *Effectiveness of preschool and comparing full-day, half-day, and alternate-day kindergartens*. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 294 648)